

# WOOD FROG

(*RANA SYLVATICA*)



## *Why the Wood Frog is a Masked Quacker*

**M**any generations ago, there was a special vernal pool where all the inhabitants lived in peace. Predators would go somewhere else when they needed a meal, for there wasn't prey in this pool, just friends. One of the animals that lived here was Mr. Wood Frog. Mr. Wood Frog was one of the friendliest critters in all of the pool, and that's saying something. Everybody loved him just as much as they loved everyone else, but they all sensed something extra special about him. He had all the good qualities of everyone else in the pool, only better. His favorite activity was to lie down on his lily pad and watch everyone play in harmony.

One day, however, Big Brother Bear from the adjacent valley couldn't find and prey in his normal spot. Bees usually lived in their hives, but not today. Brother Bear wasn't exactly the smartest animal alive, so when he couldn't find the bees, he figured they must have come to the vernal pool to visit their cousins, the dragonflies. When Brother Bear arrived, he made such a ruckus that all of the pools inhabitants lost their signature features. The Salamander lost his spots. The Peeper lost its song. The Eastern Ribbon Snake lost her stripes. Normally they would go to Grandfather Frog, but since all his unique features were gone, no-one could identify him. After weeks of searching, they finally found him, and he started to help them with their problem. The pool's inhabitants all rejoiced when they regained their features. However, he and Mr. Wood Frog had never really formed a relationship, so he didn't know any of Mr. Wood Frog's physical

features. Not knowing what to do, Grandfather Frog took one trait each from the well known Duck and Raccoon, and gave them to Mr. Wood Frog.

In the end, Mr. Wood Frog was a dull brown colored amphibian with the Duck's quack and the Raccoon's mask. Nothing has changed since.

## WOOD FROG

### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

QUACK! QUACK! What animal is that? No, it's not a duck. It's actually the voice of a male wood frog. Starting about the beginning of April, you might occasionally hear a wood frog chorus. That's because that duck-like quack is their mating call, and the females think it's rather attractive. Speaking of females, in Wood Frog Land they are larger than the males. This is because they need more room to be able to store all the eggs.

You still might not be able to tell a male and female wood frog apart. Don't feel bad, though, because not many people can tell at a glance. However, most people can tell the difference between the adult and young. Have you ever seen a tadpole? If you have, then you have seen an immature frog. This is how they look before they go through **metamorphosis**. These small (1-1 ½ inch) frantic creatures can be found swimming around in the water. They don't have arms or legs, but they have a tail. The adult wood frog can be found in many different colors, usually brown, tan, or rusty colored, but it's sometimes found in shades of green or gray. There is a white stripe along the upper lip, and sometimes there are dark stripes on its legs. It also has smooth, wet skin, which gives frogs that slimy feel. If you spot an adult Wood frog, you will find that it can range from the size of your ear to as big as your fist.

One of the coolest things about the wood frog is that it has a "Bandits Mask" across its face, just like a raccoon. If you're ever looking for a wood frog, this is one of the key features you might use to identify it. The marks around the eyes are noticeably dark, but they're attached to the frog's skin, so you know that it won't rob you.

Since it lives in the woods, the wood frog is on a permanent camping trip, and even though you might take more equipment with you than it does, it is most likely better suited for the environment. Its long, strong, muscular hind legs make it a good jumper. This is probably because of its hip joints. Of course, that's nothing to write home about. It's what most people would expect from a frog. The wood frog is **cold blooded**. It has a fluid running through its veins that stops it from actually freezing to death. If you like cars, you could call this antifreeze. Of course, they could die if it's too cold, but they can survive at much colder temperatures than humans. Because of this, they can lay their eggs in early spring, when the water is pretty close to freezing.

### HABITAT

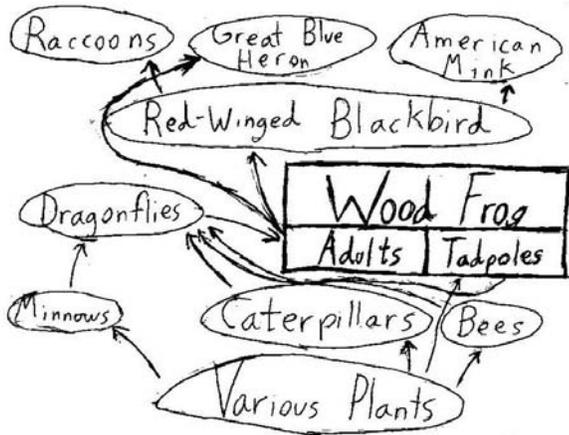
The Wood Frog is a cool climate species that likes to hang out in forests and woodlands because they offer perfect places to find vernal pools. If you live in Canada, Alaska, or somewhere in the Northeastern United States, you might be able to find one of these little animals underneath the frozen leaves.

The Wood Frog's **habitat** has enough water, sunlight, and oxygen that any human could easily survive there, assuming they don't mind eating nothing but dirt, bugs, and gross veggies. The place I am describing is full of all the **biotic** (Living) and **abiotic** (Non-living) factors essential to the survival of the Wood Frog. If there were no vernal pools, there would be no Wood Frogs. When an animal can't survive without a vernal pool it is called an **obligate** species. One reason why the wood frog needs the vernal pool is that this is where they lay their eggs. That fact sounds pretty normal until you hear that they lay their eggs in the middle of winter. They perform this important job before any of their predators are done hibernating, in order to give the eggs a head start in developing. Keep in mind, this is one of the only times of the year that the adult wood frog has anything to do with the vernal pool.

The Wood Frog is an **amphibian** with no set sleep schedule. Instead, they are happy being metaturnal. Metaturnal means sleeping and being active whenever you want to. Sometimes they even sleep in the daytime!

## WOOD FROG

### DIET & FEEDING HABITS



- **DIET:** The Wood Frogs are known predators of spiders, beetles, bugs, slugs, snails, and moth larvae. They also eat mollusks, terrestrial worms, insects, and terrestrial non-insect arthropods. The Wood Frog has also been known to munch on a nice, crunchy dragonfly.
- **PREDATORS:** Some of the known predators of the adult Wood Frog include snakes, red-winged blackbirds, and herons. Some more include powerful birds such as hawks and eagles. Certain nymphs are common predators of the tadpole, as are dragonflies.
- **PLACE IN FOOD WEB:** The Wood Frog is somewhat in the middle of the food chain. It's kind of risky to say that, though, because one of the animals eaten by the adult Wood Frog preys on Wood Frog larvae. The adult Wood Frog is mainly a carnivore, but the young's diet consists mostly of algae. The adults will also feed on algae if it's essential.
- **TROPHIC LEVEL:** The Wood Frog is a heterotrophic amphibian.

### NATURAL HISTORY

Do you remember that special mating call used by the adult male Wood Frog? Well when they quack, they are using their **courtship behavior**. This is whatever an animal does to attract a mate. When a male engages in this special activity, they are courting the female.

The Wood Frog's lifecycle has been known to confuse people a bit. First, the breeding occurs, which usually falls somewhere from early March to May. After the breeding, the females lay globular masses containing anywhere from several hundred to a few thousand eggs. The eggs can easily develop and hatch within the course of a week or two, but the **metamorphosis** is confusing. At first you might think it to be **complete metamorphosis**, but this can't be right because there is no pupa involved. It definitely is not **gradual metamorphosis**, because a tadpole looks significantly different than the adults. Whatever kind of metamorphosis it is, it happens during the 2-3 month period after the eggs hatch, and before the vernal pool dries out.

The Wood Frog is very easy to confuse with the Striped Chorus Frog. This makes sense because they are in the same Taxonomic order. This order is called anura which is home to all frogs and toads. None of the organisms in this taxonomic group have tails in their adult stage, except for Ascaphus. Crazy as it sounds, Ascaphus is scientific for tailed frogs. However, this is where the Wood Frogs and Striped Chorus Frogs split up. Out of these two frogs, only the Wood Frog is of the river or tree variety. Most of the Ranadian family members have teeth on their upper jaws, but are missing ribs. Next is the genus. The Wood Frogs fit into the genus of rana, which are the only ranids found in Australia or the Americas. The last taxonomic grouping of the Wood Frog is its species. The Wood Frog's species is the Wood Frog, or less obviously, *Rana sylvatica*.